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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000070

SIPDIS

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)

SUBJECT: SAKARYA PROVINCIAL GOVERNOR: KIRKUK REFERENDUM  
WOULD INCREASE IRANIAN INFLUENCE IN TURKEY

REF: A. ISTANBUL 015

- [1](#)B. ANKARA 137
- [1](#)C. ANKARA 136
- [1](#)D. ANKARA 133
- [1](#)E. ANKARA 132
- [1](#)F. ANKARA 115

Classified By: Consul General Deborah K. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. We met Sakarya Governor Nuri Okutan on a visit to the province's major city, Adapazari, on January 18.

What we had anticipated as a 30-minute courtesy call turned into a one-and-a-half hour lecture on Iran's historical influence in Anatolia, Turkish-Iranian relations and current policy concerns respecting Turkey, Kurds and Iran. According to Okutan, Kirkuk is a stumbling block; the U.S. should support and coordinate closer dialogue and cooperation between the Iraqi Kurds and the GOT. Otherwise, if the U.S. mishandles Iran as it did its 2003 intervention in Iraq and its "selfish" approach to Turkey that March regarding the northern option, Turks risked turning their sympathies toward Iran. This could lead to "regime change" in Turkey -- not to an Islamic Republic, but to a secular government sympathetic to Iran. This presentation by an Interior Ministry bureaucrat appears to be part of broader GOT to have the U.S. squelch the referendum later this year in Kirkuk. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) We met Sakarya Governor Nuri Okutan alone in his Adapazari office. The anticipated courtesy call turned into a one-sided discourse on unrest in the Middle East, complete with a history lesson. Okutan dated Iran's influence in Anatolia from the 15th century. Iranian influence through the Bektasi sect, popular in Anatolia's Alevi community, continues to the present, according to Okutan (REF A). The relocation of Kurds "from the south" into border regions of the Ottoman Empire with Iran was designed to buffer Turks from Persian influence. Since the 15th century, relations between Turkey and Iran have been delicately balanced by a simultaneous use of power and diplomacy.

[1](#)3. (C) Okutan claimed Kurds were "natural" allies of Turkey.

This alliance should be preserved in the current situation with Turks and Kurds working together cooperatively to oppose Iranian expansion -- seen by Ankara as a real threat to Turkey. Taking a shot at British statecraft after World War I, and mentioning Israel as only an additional "irritant," Okutan said Britain laid the foundation for the chaos in today's Middle East and warned the U.S. should not follow in Britain's steps. The only real obstacle to cooperation between the GOT and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) is, he stressed, the planned referendum later this year in Kirkuk. He said the "question has to be resolved in a peaceful manner to protect the rights of all elements in Iraq." While most seem to be focusing on the PKK, the

terrorist organization was really not as important an issue as some others. Speaking as a former Governor of Siirt Province, he said, "I can tell you that we know that your government has a dialogue with the PKK, but this is in a way understandable -- it's not a big deal." He said the U.S. should support and coordinate a closer dialogue and cooperation between the KRG and Turkey that would result in important regional benefits.

¶4. (C) Okutan then criticized the manner of the American request to launch a northern front attack against Iraq in 2003 through Turkey, which he termed "selfish and unkind." In his view, the same selfishness and impatience is seen in the overall U.S. approach to Iraq. If a similar path were taken with respect to Iran, the U.S. -- and Turkey -- run a great risk of Anatolians becoming more sympathetic to Iran. Even if Turkey were to support the United States against Iran in this situation, it was possible Turks could turn against their own government; he raised the specter of regime change in Turkey. A new government would not, according to Okutan, be Islamist, but secular and pro-Iranian. Rather than let events slide into this pit, Turks and Kurds could come together under the coordination of the U.S. Given the threat, the U.S. should take Turkey's concerns seriously.

¶5. (C) Comment. Others we met in Adapazari that day asked if our visit was timed to some important announcement as it unintentionally coincided with U/S Burns' meetings that same day in Ankara. The message delivered by Governor Okutan complements official GOT views delivered to U/S Burns and NEA PDAS Jeffrey in Ankara (REFS B-F). While Okutan's historiography and description of Turkey's politics was at points creative, the veteran Interior Ministry bureaucrat advanced a host of evidence to warn that the Kirkuk

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referendum could lead to a government in Ankara more sympathetic to Iran. End comment.  
JONES